

30 APRIL 1987

Secord to Be First Witness in Iran-Contra Hearings

By DAVID E. ROSENBAUM

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 29 — Maj. Gen. Richard V. Secord, a central figure in the Iran-contra affair who has never told his story in public, will be the opening witness when Congressional hearings begin next week, legislators announced today.

General Secord, retired from the Air Force, will be followed to the witness stand by another key figure, Robert C. McFarlane, who was President Reagan's national security adviser.

The decision to call General Secord and Mr. McFarlane as lead-off witnesses was made, according to staff members, to guarantee that the hearings started with a bang.

Senator Daniel K. Inouye, the Senate investigative committee chairman, said: "There are few witnesses who will be able to present to the nation a complete picture of what happened from the earliest days until this moment. General Secord is one of them."

Senator Inouye, a Democrat from Hawaii, said General Secord and Mr. McFarlane would be asked to provide an overview of the Reagan Administration's clandestine arms deals with Iran and its efforts to assist the Nicaraguan rebels, known as the contras.

A committee member who asked not to be identified said General Secord would provide the testimony and conclusive proof of how proceeds from the sale of arms to Iran were diverted.

In an interview on the CBS Evening News tonight, Senator Inouye took issue with the Tower Commission's characterization of President Reagan as an old man who was out of touch.

Senator Inouye said the President was "very much knowledgeable" about private efforts to raise money for the contras. "He was not a peripheral player," the Senator said. "He was involved very deeply. He knew what was happening."

Congressional leaders indicated,

however, that they had found no evidence that the President knew specifically that proceeds from the arms sales to Iran had been delivered to the Nicaraguan rebels.

The hearings begin Tuesday, and the first two witnesses are expected to be on the witness stand a week each.

After General Secord and Mr. McFarlane testify, the hearings will be broken into three stages. The first stage, expected to last until late May or early June, will concentrate on public and private efforts to supply the contras, and officials of the Central Intelligence Agency are expected to testify. The second stage will focus on the arms sales to Iran. The third phase will deal with the broad issue of what went wrong in a system of government designed to prevent abuses of authority.

Under an agreement with the independent counsel, Lawrence E. Walsh, the other main witnesses, Lieut. Col. Oliver L. North and Rear Adm. John M. Poindexter, will not testify before the middle of June.

Such high Administration officials as Secretary of State George P. Shultz, Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger and Attorney General Edwin Meese 3d may not appear until the last stage, legislators said.

General Secord and his lawyer, Thomas C. Green, have repeatedly refused to talk to reporters. But the general is said to have told associates that he believed that everything he did had been authorized by President Reagan because Colonel North told him that was the case.

General Secord, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, is said to have worked closely with Colonel North

beginning in 1984 in organizing public and private operations on behalf of the contras. He also helped Colonel North arrange shipments of arms to Iran and was a member of a secret mission to Teheran last May.

Along with his business partner, Albert Hakim, General Secord was intimately involved in almost all of the financial transactions that are under investigation.

Mr. McFarlane was national security adviser from October 1983 until December 1985 and was instrumental in arranging the sale of arms to Iran. He was brought back for the secret mission to Iran last May.

Unlike General Secord, Mr. McFarlane cooperated with the Senate intelligence committee, which conducted a preliminary investigation in December.